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ABSTRACT

Designed for all incoming international students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, this handbook answers questions and offers information and strategies that can be used to make their transition into the U.S. system easier. It explains the expectations, norms, and procedures of the U.S. educational system. The handbook is divided into five main sections. The first is an overview of the U.S. educational system. Next is a section on classes that discusses choosing classes, registration, and how to make the most of lectures, discussion classes, and readings. This is followed by a section on written assignments and tests that provides general advice, discusses the differences between paraphrasing, summarizing, and plagiarizing, and presents a guide for writing a research paper. The section on tests discusses the types of tests and test questions that may be encountered and offers advice about studying for and taking tests. The last section contains suggestions about where to go for additional help or to have questions answered, both academic and nonacademic. Many subsections contain lists of "DOs" and "DON'Ts," that point out the expected norms in the U.S. system. Each section is relatively independent. A 12-item bibliography is included. (JB)

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Strategies for Succeeding
in a U.S. University:
A Handbook
for Incoming Foreign Students

Susan Hobbs

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INTRODUCTION

Who this Handbook is For

If you come from a country other than the United States and are entering an American college or university for the first time, then this handbook has been written for you. The handbook has been designed to help all incoming "international" or "foreign" students (as you will be called if you are not a citizen of the United States), at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Its main purpose is to answer some of the questions that you might have, and to provide you with information and strategies you can use in order to make your transition into the American system easier. The handbook will explain the expectations, norms, and procedures of the American educational system, which, for some of you, may be quite different from the system you are used to.

How to Use this Handbook

This handbook is divided into five main sections. The first is an overview of the American educational system. Next is a section on classes, followed by sections on written assignments and on tests. Lastly, there is a section which contains suggestions about where you can get additional help or get questions answered, both academic and non-academic. Many sub-sections contain lists of "DOs" and "DONTs," to which you should pay special attention, since they let you know what the expected norms in the American system are.

Depending on your background and interest, you will probably find some parts of this handbook more useful, or more relevant, than others. Each section is relatively independent of the others, so you can skip around and read whatever will be of most use to you. While it would certainly benefit you to read all or part of the handbook before classes begin, some sections in it will make better sense once you've been in classes for a few weeks. You can refer to the table of contents to see how the handbook has been organized; there is a detailed index at the end of the handbook, plus a bibliography.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

A General Description

Public school education for a child in the United States usually begins when the child is four or five years old. The child may go to kindergarten for one year, then enter primary (elementary) school. Primary school education lasts for eight years, as the child moves from grade one to grade eight. After grade eight, the student goes on to high school for four years. Grades nine through twelve are the high school years. Most students graduate from high school at the age of 17 or 18. Education is compulsory (required) until the age of 16, and is free in the public school system. Private schools (independently funded) and parochial schools (affiliated with religious bodies) are another option, but they can be quite expensive.

Post-secondary education in the United States is available in a variety of forms. There are vocational schools, at which students can learn a particular trade, and there are two-year community colleges, which offer inexpensive courses, often in the evenings, where people from the community can take courses. Most students who wish to pursue their education past high school enter a four-year college or university, however.

Colleges and universities can be either public or private. There are public universities in each state—these are usually large institutions, with a student population that could be as great as 80,000. Tuition at a public or state university is less than tuition at a private university or college, especially for residents of that state, since these institutions receive funding from the state. Private colleges and universities are not dependent on funding from the state. They are often much smaller in size, with student populations as low as 800 or 1,000 students, although most are larger.

The terms **college** and **university** are often confused. Both colleges and universities grant bachelor's degrees (such as the B.A., or Bachelor of Arts), but colleges usually don't grant graduate degrees, such as the Master's (M.A.) or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). Universities do grant graduate degrees, and they are more research-oriented than colleges are. Universities are therefore generally bigger in size than colleges, and a university may consist of one or more colleges, as well as graduate schools, such as a business school, a law school, an architecture school, a medical school, etc. In this handbook, the term "university" is used in more of a generic sense, to refer to both colleges and universities. In conversation you will often hear the term "college" used, however, to refer to either colleges or universities, e.g., "Where do you go to college?"

Students who are studying for their bachelor's degree are called **undergraduates**, while students who have their bachelor's degree and are pursuing a graduate degree are called **graduates**. A first year undergraduate is called a **freshman**; a second year undergraduate is called a **sophomore**; the third year undergraduate is a **junior**, while the final year student is called a **senior**. This classification does not continue in graduate school, however. Graduate students are usually just referred to according to the degree they hope to gain, e.g., law student, business or MBA student, Master's student, or Ph.D. candidate. It may take a student one or two years to gain a Master's degree; it takes four or five years (sometimes longer) to gain a Ph.D. after obtaining a B.A.

It may be possible for you to **transfer** into a college or university if you have already had some post-secondary instruction, although transferring from an institution that is outside the United States can be quite complicated since educational systems vary so much from place to place. If you wish to transfer to an American university or college, and if you wish to get **credit** for courses you have already taken, bring as much information about these courses and the institution you studied at as you can—this includes course syllabi, tests, course descriptions, official transcripts, etc.

American colleges and universities generally follow a **liberal arts** philosophy. The idea behind the liberal arts tradition is that a student who graduates from university or college should do so having had a "well-rounded" education. In some countries, students who enter university study only one subject, such as economics, for the entire three or four years. In the United States, however, students are required to take subjects in a variety of areas. This makes them more adaptable, flexible, and more able to cope with a changing job market, as well as with life in general, it is believed. Thus while students will **major** in one area, they are required to take only about a third of their courses in that field. The rest of the courses can be from

any discipline, as long as the student has satisfied certain general educational requirements (sometimes known as **distributional** or **breadth** requirements). These requirements ensure that each student takes courses in different areas—perhaps two courses in the social sciences, two in the “hard” sciences, and two in arts and humanities. There may be other requirements that vary from institution to institution, such as a language requirement, or a writing or English requirement, as well. Still, it is possible for a freshman to take courses in astronomy, history, English, and anthropology all in one semester. Courses that you take which are not required courses are called **electives**.

If you are an undergraduate, you won't have to declare your **major** (the field in which you plan to specialize) until sometime during your sophomore (second) year. This will give you time to try courses in a number of subject areas before having to make the decision. When choosing a major, it is most important that it be in a field that really interests you, since you won't be getting specific job training at the undergraduate level (with a few exceptions). It is also possible to have a **minor concentration** in another subject area, or have a **double major**, if there are two areas which really interest you.

In the United States, the academic year is usually divided into two **semesters** of equal length, about 14 weeks each. The first starts in late August or early September, and ends around the third week of December. The second begins in January or early February and continues until sometime in May. Some universities operate on a quarterly system, however, in which you attend classes for three out of the four quarters. There may also be summer sessions (May through August) at some of the bigger universities in which a limited number of classes are offered. You may prefer to attend a university that offers summer classes so you can continue your studies year-round.

The term **instructor** is used throughout this handbook to refer to whoever is teaching a particular course. This instructor may be a full professor, an associate professor, an assistant professor, a lecturer, an associate instructor (AI), or a graduate teaching assistant (TA). AIs and TAs are graduate students—they often help teach undergraduate classes or conduct discussion sessions in the larger universities. Graduate courses are always taught by university professors, however.

Most American colleges and universities are **coeducational**, which means that both men and women attend classes together, and are treated as equals. Men and women may even live in the same **dormitories**, or dorms, although some dorms are single sex. Most American universities have residential dormitories, as well as off-campus housing. Living in a dorm has its advantages, since you can get food in a cafeteria, and you can do your laundry using the washers and dryers provided in the dorms; it can also be a good place to meet other students. If you have just arrived in the United States for the first time, it would probably be much easier for you to live in a dormitory at first. Later on, you may prefer to find your own housing with some friends, perhaps in an apartment, where you'll be able to do your own cooking. Just remember to notify the Registrar's office at the university if you change your address.

Evaluation and Grades

1. Grading systems.

American colleges and universities use letter grades, ranging from A+ (A plus) to D- (D minus), with the grade of F used as a failing grade. In general, for an undergraduate, the following system is usually used, with grades arranged from highest to lowest:

A+, A, or A-	(Excellent)
B+, B, or B-	(Good)
C+, C, or C-	(Average)
D+, D, or D-	(Poor, but still passing, for non-major subjects)
F	(Failing)

For a graduate student, most universities use an A-B-C system, since a B- average or better is required at the graduate level. This means that if a graduate student receives anything lower than a B-, it is an unacceptable grade.

These letter grades are often based on numerical grades, or percentages. Although the system varies from school to school and instructor to instructor, an A may for instance range from 90-100; a B from 80-90; a C from 70-80; a D from 60-70; and an F for any score lower than 60. Some instructors may **curve** some exam grades, especially if the exam was particularly difficult. When scores are graded on a curve, a student's performance is compared with the other student's scores, so that a few students may receive A's and F's, a few more will receive B's and D's, and the remainder will receive C's, the most common score.

What follows are some terms that you may hear which have to do with courses and grades.

Grade Point Average (GPA). Your GPA is a numerical average of your letter grades. It gives employers and other institutions an idea of how you performed overall. Most colleges and universities follow a 4-point scale. Points are awarded as follows:

A+, A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
C+	2.3	F	0.0

Note that in this scale, no extra points are awarded for receiving an A+ as opposed to an A. A GPA of 3.5 or above indicates that the student is doing exceptionally well.

Other institutions may use different scales, such as a 5-point scale or a 12-point scale. With a 12-point scale, for example, an A+ is given 12 points; an A is given 11; and so on down the line.

Pass/Fail, or Credit courses. In some undergraduate programs, students may choose to take a limited number of courses pass/fail, or for credit only (perhaps two courses in all). Usually you can not take any of your major courses pass/fail. Taking a pass/fail course means that as long as you pass the course, you will receive a grade of P for the course.

Auditing a course. Yet another possibility is to audit a course. If you audit a course, you will not receive any credit for the course, but the fact that you audited the course will be noted on your transcript (see section on transcripts, p. 6). It may cost less to audit a course than to take it for credit, and you don't have to do any of the work or assignments—you just attend the classes. One problem with auditing courses is that if you audit a course instead of taking a course for credit, it may affect your status as a full-time student, so check on this before you decide to audit a course. Students usually audit courses, often in subjects outside of their major, because they are interested in the subject and wish to learn more about it.

Incompletes. If you take a course in which you are unable to complete the required coursework—due to sickness, for example—you should talk with your instructor immediately. Rather than giving you an F, which is a failing grade, your instructor may be able to give you an incomplete, as long as your grades in the course thus far have been satisfactory. A grade of incomplete means that if you can complete the required coursework within a limited amount of time, such as a year, the grade of incomplete will be removed from your academic transcript and replaced by the letter grade you achieved in the course. If you do not complete the coursework within the allotted time, however, the grade of incomplete is usually changed to an F.

Withdrawals. Although deadlines and regulations will vary from institution to institution, it is usually possible to withdraw from a course after the drop/add period (see p. 8). If you withdraw from the class before a certain deadline, your transcripts will be marked W for that course, as long as you notify the Registrar's office of your withdrawal. Withdrawals after the deadline may require special permission.

Honor roll. In many undergraduate institutions, any student who attains a certain grade point average (such as a 3.0 or better) may be put on the honor roll, which is sometimes called a Dean's list or a similar name. Students whose names are put on the honor roll will receive written notification of the fact, and their transcripts will record this achievement.

Transcript. A transcript is an official document issued through the Registrar's office of a college or university, in which a student's courses, grades, and cumulative GPA are listed. Courses which were audited or taken pass/fail will also appear on the transcripts, as will any honors, such as being on an honor roll or Dean's list. Prospective employers and graduate schools you apply to will usually want to see a copy of your transcript.

2. The composition of course grades.

One aspect of the American system which may distinguish it from other educational systems is that course grades are not based on one, comprehensive, all-or-nothing final exam. In American classes, your final course grade is determined from a combination of sources. The final exam, which lasts for about two hours, usually counts for no more than 40 percent of your final grade. The rest of the grade may come from written assignments, a mid-term exam, other tests and quizzes (see p. 36), class participation, attendance, homework, etc. The components which make up the grade will differ from course to course; your instructor should tell you on the first day of class how the final grade will be calculated. The grades for some courses will be determined mostly from test scores; for example, the first test may be worth 20 percent of the grade, the second test 30 percent, and the final exam 40 percent; with homework, participation, and attendance counting for the last 10 percent. Another course may involve a combination of two tests plus one or two short papers. Some classes may not even have a final exam—there may be a take-home project, a report, or a final paper in its place.

Here are some important points to consider:

- **DO** try to attend every class. In many classes, attendance counts as part of the grade, especially in upper-level or discussion classes, or in science labs.
- **DO** try to take part in the discussion, especially if class participation counts as part of the course grade. In the smaller discussion classes (fewer than 30 students), class participation could count for up to 15 percent of the grade. Although you may feel shy or uncomfortable about speaking in class, you should try to get involved in the discussion, even if all you do is to ask an occasional question.
- **DO** work consistently and conscientiously throughout the semester, especially since the final exam is not the only factor determining your eventual grade. Don't fall behind in your work, and start studying for tests well in advance of the test date (5-7 days in advance would be best).
- **DON'T** panic if you get a low grade on the first test you take. It will only count as a percentage of your grade, and if you do better on subsequent tests, you can still get a good mark in the course, especially if your instructor notices an improvement in your work.

CLASSES

Choosing Classes

When you arrive at an American college or university for the first time, you will face the task of choosing and registering for classes. Since there may be hundreds of courses to choose from, you will need to get some guidance as to what courses to choose.

Whether you are going to be a freshman or a graduate student, you will be assigned an **academic advisor**. Your academic advisor will be able to help you choose classes for the upcoming semester and make tentative plans about which classes you might take in the future. You will probably need your advisor's written approval of your course choices.

When trying to decide which classes to take, here are some points to keep in mind:

- **DO** be flexible. You may not be able to take every class you want to, exactly when you want to. Some courses fill up before the end of registration. You should therefore choose one or two classes as second choice classes in case you can't get all the classes you want.
- **DO** try to get a balance between "test" courses, "writing" or "paper" courses, and "lab" courses. You don't want to end up taking four courses, all of which have final papers due during the last week of classes, for example.
- **DO** try to balance required courses with electives. Although it's a good idea to satisfy distributional requirements during freshman or sophomore year, if you are an undergraduate, you should still be able to take a few electives that really interest you. If you are a graduate student who plans to take summer courses as well as regular classes during the academic year, be aware that very few elective courses are offered during the summer.
- **DO** pay attention to the days of the week and the times of day that classes meet, as well as to the location of these classes on campus. You don't want to have one class end at 10:05 and another that begins in a classroom 1/4 mile away at 10:15, especially since some instructors don't always end their classes exactly on time. Think also about whether you would prefer morning classes, afternoon classes, or a combination of both, since the same class may have more than one section that meets at different times. As you become more familiar with the university, you may begin to choose classes according to who the instructor is.
- **DO** pay attention to prerequisites, course restrictions, and concentration or major requirements. A **prerequisite** is something that you need to have in order to be able to take a particular course. For example, the course guide may say that in order to take Astronomy 241, you may have to have taken Astronomy 100 first. A course **restriction** may be something like, "This course, Biology 120, is for non-majors only." The restriction means that you can't take Biology 120 if you are a biology major. Concentration or **major requirements** are usually listed under each subject. If you are majoring in linguistics, for example, you might be required to take L101, L102, L201, L234, and L301, as well as four other linguistics courses and two language courses in order to satisfy the requirements for a major in linguistics. There will be fewer courses you have to take if you are simply concentrating in a particular area.
- **DON'T** forget to sign up for a discussion section or a lab section if one is required.
- **DON'T** overload yourself with too many classes your first semester, and pay attention to the number of **credit hours** a course is worth. Although at some institutions all courses are worth the same number of credits, at most universities courses are weighted differently. Some courses are only worth one credit hour, while others may be worth four credit hours. You wouldn't want to take four four-credit courses at the same time, for example, although having one four-credit course and three three-credit ones might work out well.

Registration and Drop/Add

Since the rules regarding registration and drop/add procedures will vary greatly from institution to institution, you will have to find out what these procedures are when you arrive. Here are some very general pointers.

- **DO** follow registration instructions carefully, and **ask** someone if you have questions.
- **DO** try to register on time.
- **DON'T** be shy about changing classes once the semester has begun. During the first week of classes, usually over half the students change at least one of their classes using the drop and add system. You do not need to have the instructor's permission to drop the class during the drop/add period, although you may need to get permission from the course instructor to add a course. In all cases, make sure you follow established drop/add procedures, so that your name is removed from the class that you dropped and added to the other class. Also, if you wait too long to drop a class, you may lose some or all of the money you paid for the class. If you do decide to change one of your courses, try to sit in on the course you want to take as soon as possible (even if you aren't officially registered for it yet), as long as the instructor agrees and as long as there is space available in that class.

Making the Most of Lecture Classes

The purpose of attending a lecture is not for you to be able to repeat the lecture word for word afterwards. You are expected to be able to synthesize and analyze the content of the lecture, to recognize relationships, and know how to apply general principles. This is why memorization is not enough—you need to understand what lies behind the words as well. In order to be able to do well in a lecture course, you will need to attend the lectures, learn to take effective notes in them, and do the readings and any assignments.

1. Attendance and preparation.

In most large lecture classes in the U.S., attendance is never taken since it would take too long. Therefore, it is entirely up to you as to whether you come to class or not. In a very large class (more than 100 students), your instructor will not notice if you are there or not. Nevertheless there are many reasons why you should come to class:

- Lectures do not always consist of a repetition of what is in the readings. Often, lectures contain additional information that is not in the readings or the text. They may also help you to understand better what was in the readings, by presenting similar material in a different way.
- Your instructor may test you on anything that is said in a lecture, and may even test you more on the lecture material than on material that is in the text or the readings.
- Looking through someone else's notes from a class you missed cannot replace the experience of having heard the lecture yourself.
- In the American system, you must take responsibility for your educational success or failure. If you do poorly in a class, it reflects poorly on you, not on the instructor, as is the case in some countries. By missing classes, you may miss out on some of the most important parts of the course, and your grade for the course may be lower as a result.

If you know in advance that you have to miss a class, you should try to notify the instructor and explain the reason for your absence. You can also ask a classmate if you can look at his or her notes later on. While this is not as good as being in class, it will at least give you an idea of what was covered in the lecture. If you have to miss a lot of classes due to sickness, you should probably talk to the instructor and find out exactly what topics were covered in your absence.

In order to make the most of a lecture class, you should be prepared for the lecture.

- **DO** arrive early, so you can get your notebook and pen out, get settled in your seat, and be ready for the lecture.
- **DO** get a seat near the front of the lecture hall. This way you can hear everything; you can see the gestures that the instructor makes, or anything that is written on the blackboard; and you will not be so distracted by seeing a lot of people in front of you.
- **DO** read the assigned readings for that day before you arrive in class, and be familiar with the course outline and where this lecture fits in with course objectives. You will understand the lecture much better if you have some idea what the instructor will be talking about. Note-taking will also be easier, since you will have a better idea about what is most important about the topic.

2. Note-taking.

Taking effective notes from lectures is a task that many native English speakers find difficult to do. For non-native English speakers, the task is all the more difficult. You may have problems comprehending everything, writing down important points fast enough, or determining just what to write down. While in time, practice will improve your note-taking skills, here are some short-term hints that may help you at first.

- **DO** have a separate notebook or a separate section in a binder for each subject, so you won't confuse notes from one class with notes from another class. It is also helpful to use notebooks with "pockets" at the front or back of the notebook, so you can have a place to keep handouts from the instructor.
- **DO** date your notes.
- **DO** write in ink. Pencil smudges.
- **DO** write legibly, so you will be able to read what you have written.
- **DO** try to write down the title, or subject, of each lecture. Most instructors will tell you in advance what they will be lecturing on—lecture topics may be listed in the course **syllabus** (the outline of the course given to you by the instructor), for example—or else the instructor will almost certainly tell you at the start of each lecture what the subject will be.
- **DO** write down everything the instructor writes on the board, but **DON'T** think that you are responsible for knowing only what the instructor writes on the board. You are responsible for knowing everything said in class, so take notes on anything that sounds important.
- **DON'T** try to write down every word—you won't be able to. On the other hand, don't take too few notes, thinking that you will remember everything. After one or two weeks, you will have forgotten the lecture unless you take notes that you can reread to refresh your memory. It is better to have too many notes than too few notes.
- **DO** listen for verbal signals (cues) which will let you know whether something that is being said is important or not. Pay particular attention to lists, which will be introduced by a phrase such as "There are four major reasons why the U.S. got involved in World War I." After hearing this, you can be sure that you will hear these four reasons, which you should write down. Also listen for phrases such as "Now, this is an essential point to remember, because..." Write down anything which the instructor tells you is particularly important, and write down why it is important.
- **DON'T** worry if you make a mistake when taking notes. Just cross out the word and go on. No one else cares how neat your notes are—the important thing is that *you* can make sense out of what you have written.
- **DO** take notes in English. You will lose time if you try to translate everything into your own language. Also, you may need to know and recognize appropriate terminology *in English*. If you are unfamiliar with a word, you can look it up in a dictionary after class.

- **DON'T** try to write everything in complete sentences. You don't need to write in words such as "the," for example, which don't contribute to the meaning of the sentence.
- **DO** talk with your instructors if you are having difficulties or if you have questions you want answered. It may be possible to talk with instructors after class, but the best time to see instructors is during their weekly office hours. It may be a good idea to make an appointment for a specific time, too.
- **DO** use **abbreviations**, as long as *you* know what they mean. By using abbreviations, you can spend more time listening, and less time writing. There are some common abbreviations that everyone may recognize, such as \$, %, &, <, >, +, or =; but you can make up your own depending on the subject matter. For example, if you are listening to a lecture about Plato's *Republic*, you might use the abbreviation P to refer to the philosopher Plato, while using Rep to refer to *Republic*.

Here are additional suggestions for abbreviations. Use them only if they make sense for you. Although periods have been included, you don't need to use periods after abbreviations in your notes if you don't want to. (On tests, however, you should avoid using abbreviations.)

betw.	between
e.g.	for example (from the Latin <i>exempli gratia</i> .)
esp.	especially
etc.	etcetera; and so on.
fr.	from
i.e.	that is (from the Latin <i>id est</i> .)
imp.	important
max.	maximum
min.	minimum
pp.	pages
re	regarding
v.	very
w/	with
w/out	without

" ditto. This mark is used directly under something which you want to repeat, for example:

Albany is the capital of New York.
Paris " " " " France.

≠ is not equal to

↑ increases; gets bigger. E.g., If you hear, "Prices increased from May to September, 1985," you could write: Prices ↑ fr. May-Sept. '85.

↓ decreases; gets smaller

+, & and

∴ therefore

~ , ≈ about; approximately; e.g., My dog is ~seven years old.

→, ⇒ implies, e.g., A shortage of goods → higher prices.

Of course, you will develop your own abbreviations depending on the subject you are studying. For example, if you are studying mathematics or another science subject, you can use abbreviations such as H₂O for water, or Σ for sum. If you are studying Political Science (pol. sci.), you can use Pres. instead of President; VP instead of Vice-President.

One final point about note-taking. As soon as possible after the class is over, try to take five or ten minutes to look over your notes. Identify important items from the lecture by putting an asterisk (*) beside them. Elaborate on any notes that seem incomplete, while you can still remember what the lecturer said. (It may be useful to do this together with a classmate, so you can help each other clarify those aspects of the lecture about which you were uncertain.) Write important key words in the left margin, next to the place where they appear in your notes. And try to write a brief, written summary of the main points of the lecture in your own words, in your notebook. In this way, through repetition, you will find it much easier to recall what was said in the lecture. It is important that you try to do this right after the lecture, or at least the same day as the lecture, before you forget what was said. This process of going over your notes after each lecture will also make the task of studying for tests much easier.

3. Tape-recording lectures

Some students who worry about their ability to take good notes tape-record lectures. Taping lectures has several advantages, but it has more disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages are listed below:

- Students who tape lectures may not pay much attention when the lecture is in progress. Studies have shown that students who take notes during the lecture remember more of the lecture than students who just listened without taking notes.
- Tape quality may not be very good, particularly in a large class. When you get home you may find that you can't understand everything on the tape.
- Most lectures last longer than the standard tape cassette, therefore you would have to turn over the tape in the middle of the lecture. This may annoy the instructor as well as other students.
- Listening to the tape after class and making notes from it can take an excessive amount of time, especially if you are taping lectures from more than one class. And you should certainly **not** waste your time making a word-for-word transcription of the lecture from the tape-recording. What is important about a lecture is not the lecturer's exact words, but the ideas and concepts that these words express.
- A tape recording will not capture the visual cues and gestures used by the instructor, nor will it make it easy for you to link what was written on the board with what was said during the lecture.
- Some instructors do not like their lectures to be tape-recorded. If you do want to tape-record a lecture, get the instructor's permission first.

In short, you should avoid tape-recording lectures, unless you feel it absolutely necessary to record the first few lectures so that you can get used to the instructor's accent and teaching style. If you find you can not understand the lectures unless you tape-record them and go over them slowly afterward, perhaps you should consider taking some remedial English classes to improve your listening skills. If your difficulty is not in comprehension but in your ability to take notes, try getting involved in a study group in which you can share notes with fellow classmates, or at least compare yours with theirs to see where you are having difficulties.

Making the Most of Discussion Classes and Labs

1. Attendance.

As stated earlier, attendance is important, especially in discussion classes and laboratories (labs). Many large lecture classes are divided into smaller groups of 15-30 students who meet once a week with an assistant instructor, a teaching assistant, the course instructor, or another member of the department for a discussion. Science classes almost always have weekly labs in addition to the lectures; while the lecture classes may be large, they will be divided into smaller sections for the labs. You may also encounter small discussion classes in upper-level courses. In all cases, poor or irregular attendance will almost certainly hurt your chances of getting a good grade.

If you know in advance that you will have to miss a discussion class or a lab, you should notify your instructor and explain why you will be absent. If you missed several classes because of sickness, you should also explain this to your instructor, since, if you say nothing to your instructor about the reasons for your absences, the instructor may get the idea that you don't care about the course or that you are lazy.

2. Preparation and participation.

Coming prepared for class is very important in the case of discussion classes or in the discussion sections of a lecture class. Make sure you have read all the reading assignments before coming to class, and try to join in the discussion and state your opinion when in class, even though you may find this difficult to do at first. Your instructors may not realize that in your country, perhaps, students are expected to keep quiet and not voice opinions—so they may misinterpret your silence or think that you don't understand. Discussion sessions are also a good time for you to ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions—questioning is an important part of the learning process. And don't be afraid to disagree with something you have read. Critical analysis is expected of students in an American university or college.

In science labs, you will learn how to use scientific equipment properly and how to conduct experiments. Again, you should have done any preparatory reading before coming to class; however, labs are not really a place for discussion so you probably won't have to be prepared to discuss anything. What you will need to do is listen carefully and attentively, follow instructions properly, and make and record observations.

Making the Most of Textbooks and Assigned Readings

1. Types of reading materials.

For any course, you may have a variety of reading materials. These may include reserve readings, photocopied articles, class handouts, optional readings, and any textbooks which are required for the class.

Textbooks. In most classes, you will be asked to buy one or more textbooks for the course. Since textbook prices are high, you may wish to look for second-hand (used) copies at one of the campus bookstores. If you do buy a book second-hand, however, make sure the binding is good and that the pages are not heavily underlined or covered with someone else's comments. If you can't find a relatively clean copy of the textbook, it would be better to buy a new one. Some people borrow books from friends, but this has the disadvantage that you can't make any marks in them. Generally, it's best to have your own books.

Reserve readings. Reserve readings are any reading materials which have been put on reserve at a campus library or reading room. This means that you can only look at these materials in that area—you generally can't take them out of the room, although you may be able to photocopy them—and there is also a time limit for looking at them, such as two or four hours. Although there will probably be more than one copy of the required article or book on reserve, you may still have trouble looking at it if your classmates are using all the copies. Therefore, you should try to do reserve readings as soon as possible, rather than on the evening before they are to be read. Please note: Never make any marks in any document that is on reserve.

Photocopied articles. Since reserve readings are somewhat inconvenient to have to use, some instructors will prepare packets of photocopied articles that students can purchase if they prefer to have their own copies. Photocopied packets are relatively inexpensive and you can ask your instructor to put them together if this service is available at your college or institution. They are worth buying since you then have the freedom of being able to read them when you want and where you want, and of marking them or making comments in them as you wish. You can also refer to them more easily than you can to a reserve reading when studying for a test.

Class handouts. From time to time, your instructor may give you articles or other items to read. You should read them as soon as possible, and keep them along with your other notes for that class—perhaps by putting them in a "pocket" in your notebook.

Optional readings. Optional readings are just that—you don't have to do them unless you have the time or desire to read them. An instructor won't test you on any optional materials; however, if you do read them, you may gain a better understanding of the subject matter.

2. Reading and marking your books.

Although some students may be reluctant to make any marks in books, you will find that you will benefit much more from the readings if you do mark your books while you read. Marking your books can be done in many different ways. You can underline important sentences, circle key words, make stars in the margin next to summarizing passages, or write down your own impressions of the text. There is no one correct way of marking the text—you must learn to mark your texts in a way that is appropriate and understandable to you, so that by looking at your marks and notations, you can recall what was written in the text.

Here are some points to consider:

- **DON'T** ever make marks in a book or article which does not belong to you.
- **DON'T** look up every unfamiliar word in a dictionary, otherwise you could spend hours trying to read a short assignment. Try to guess the meaning of the word through context. If it seems to be essential that you know the exact meaning of an unfamiliar word, however, look it up in an *English* dictionary, not a bilingual one.
- **DO** try to get the main ideas or main points of the reading selection by **skimming** through the reading, i.e., reading through it quickly just so you can get an idea of the content. Pay attention to the title and the subtitles, and to any summarizing paragraphs that may occur at the end of the selection. Later, you can go back and look at details more carefully. It is not necessary to read and understand every word and sentence.
- **DO** identify definitions, examples, and lists of items, by making some kind of mark in your text.
- **DON'T** mark *everything* in the reading, or your markings become meaningless. Mark only essential sentences. These often occur at the beginning or end of paragraphs.
- **DO** note your reactions or comments in the margin. Reading should be an active process, and you should try to form opinions about what you read, and note what is meaningful to you.

Organizing Your Time Outside of Class

Since you will probably spend no more than 15 hours a week in class, you will be left with a lot of unstructured time that is yours to use wisely or to waste as you choose. Managing your time can be quite difficult, especially if you have members of your family here with you. Here are some suggestions that may help you structure non-class time more effectively.

- **DON'T** procrastinate. In other words, start doing readings and other assignments as early as possible. Don't delay doing assignments until the last minute. How you use or misuse your time is your responsibility.
- **DO** make a weekly calendar, especially for the first few weeks, so you can keep track of when your classes are. You can also buy commercially produced "Daily Planners" for an entire year or semester in which you can write down due dates of future assignments and tests as well as appointments, social events, etc.

- **DO** make a list of "things to do." Not everyone likes to use lists, but having a list of tasks to be accomplished is a very methodical and safe method of making sure that you don't forget to do important tasks—as long as you don't lose the list. You could even carry around a small notebook to your classes, in which you write down all your homework assignments. This task orientation is probably more effective than deciding to spend 1 hour each night on calculus, 30 minutes on biology homework, etc.
- **DO** allow yourself enough time for non-academic activities as well, rather than trying to study every minute of the day. Allow yourself time for writing letters home, getting some exercise, doing laundry, going shopping, attending films or concerts, or spending time with your family (if you have a spouse or children with you) and friends.
- **DO** get enough sleep. Some students like to "pull all-nighters," in which they stay up all night to complete an assignment or paper that is due the next day. All-nighters are not recommended, and should be completely unnecessary for anyone who starts assignments early and uses time wisely. You should try to get a full night's sleep on most nights, especially before a test, so that you'll be alert and clear-headed at all times.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

General Advice for any Written Assignment

1. Information that needs to be included.

Certain pieces of information need to be included on every written assignment. For short assignments, or homework assignments that you are turning in to the instructor, you will not need a title page, but you should include the following at the top of the page: your name, the course number, the instructor's name (optional), and the date, followed by some kind of title that identifies what you are writing about, plus any other relevant information. For example, if you are going to write a summary of an article, you could set up the top of the page like this:

Maria Perez
Economics 101
May 18, 1988

A Summary of "The Texas Pipeline"
(Time, May 16, 1988, p. 47)

For a more formal written assignment, such as a research paper, you will need a title page (see pp. 28-29).

2. Organization.

No matter if you are writing a one-page essay, a book report, a lab write-up, or a research paper, you need to write in paragraphs. Here are some points you should consider:

- **DO** begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that expresses the main idea; it should then be followed by other sentences that illustrate or express that main idea.
- **DO** begin a new paragraph whenever you finish one idea and start another.

- **DO** indent the first line of each paragraph whenever you start a new paragraph, by beginning the line about five spaces to the right of the left margin. You need to make this indentation even if you are writing by hand:

indentation

— These sentences are here as an illustration of the terms "indentation" and "paragraph." A paragraph usually begins with an indentation of about five spaces.

A new paragraph is begun whenever there is another idea to discuss. The paragraph indentation shows the reader that a new paragraph has been started.

} paragraph

} paragraph

The American style of writing may differ from the style you are used to. Americans are direct. And your instructors will expect you to be direct too, even if this seems unnatural to you. The following suggestions may help you to write more directly.

- **DON'T** provide excessive background material that is generally unrelated to your subject. If you are writing about agriculture in your country, for example, you don't need to begin your paper with an extensive discussion of the history and culture of your country, unless that information is *absolutely vital* to a discussion of agriculture.
- **DO** state your topic or main idea (the thesis, or the point of your paper) in the *first* paragraph. Any paper you write should not be purely descriptive (unless you are asked to write a descriptive paper in an English class)—it should also be **analytical**. You should present a point of view—an argument—in the first paragraph, and you should list your supporting statements in the rest of the paper.
- **DO** summarize your arguments and conclusions in the last paragraph. You can not just present facts and leave the reader to form his or her own conclusions. You must tie everything together and synthesize the arguments yourself.
- **DON'T** write in the first person, e.g., don't use the word "I." You can make your opinions clear without using "I." For example, rather than saying, "I think that we should do X because it would benefit Y," you can say, simply, "Doing X would benefit Y."
- **DO** write only about the topic you are asked to or supposed to write about. For example, don't provide any information about yourself, or your background, unless you are asked to write about yourself.

3. Appearance.

Some instructors will allow you to turn in hand-written assignments, but almost all instructors prefer to read something that has been typed, either on a typewriter, or on a desk-top computer, using a word-processing program. Here are some general pointers that apply whether or not the paper has been typed or hand-written:

- **DO** use only plain, 8 1/2" x 11" (standard-sized), white, paper. Don't use graph paper, squared paper, or legal-sized paper unless you are told to do so.
- **DO** leave margins (spaces) at the top, bottom, and sides of anything you write or type. Margins should be about one inch on all sides. Margins make your assignment easier to read and provide space for the instructor's comments.
- **DON'T** hand in anything that has torn pages or stains on it.
- **DO** staple the pages together in the top, left-hand corner.

- **DO** number the pages if there are three or more of them.
- **DO** try to follow the guidelines established by your instructor regarding format, style, and length. If you are told to do a five-page paper, don't turn in one that is two pages long, or one that is ten pages long.
- **DON'T** put your paper in any kind of a folder. This only makes it more bulky for your instructor to carry.
- **DO** make a photocopy of anything you hand in, or else save the file on your diskette if you are using a computer.
- **DON'T** put fancy marks or decorations on your paper. For example, you don't need to put # # # or "The End" at the end of your paper to show that it is finished.
- **DO proofread** your paper carefully before you hand it in. This means reading it slowly to check for typing or spelling errors, grammar errors, illegible writing, etc. It might be a good idea to ask a native-English speaker to look through the paper with you and identify such errors for you to fix. Use an English dictionary to check the spelling of *any* word you are not absolutely sure about.
- **DO** look over assignments of yours that your instructor has handed back to you. Try to learn from any comments that the instructor has made so you can improve future assignments. Don't throw away any old assignments while the course is still in progress.

If you do hand in something that has been handwritten, make sure you have written legibly, so that the instructor can read it easily. Write only in blue or black ink on lined paper.

If you hand in an assignment that has been typed either on a typewriter or a word-processor, you should follow these additional procedures:

- **DO** use good-quality, unlined paper. Don't use thin "onion-skin" erasable paper, for example.
- **DO** type double-spaced; in other words, type on every other line. This makes it easier for your instructor to read, and gives him or her extra space for making comments.
- **DO** separate the computer print-out pages, if you are using a computer and a printer.
- **DON'T** hyphenate words at the ends of lines, and *never* let the computer do this for you. Hyphenated words are harder to read, and hyphenation is often done incorrectly.
- **DON'T** justify (align) the right-hand margin; it produces strange spacings between the words and makes your text too difficult to read.
- **DO** try to use a typewriter typeface or a printer that produces easy-to-read type. Some typewriters have a fancy script typeface—avoid this, since the type is too fussy to read. If you typed your paper on a computer, try to get your paper printed on a letter-quality printer. The draft-mode typeface used by most dot matrix printers is very pale and too is too hard to read easily.
- **DO** change the ribbon on the printer or typewriter if it produces type that is no longer dark and easy to read.

4. The benefits of word-processing.

Even if you don't know how to type or use a word-processor, it would be well worth the time and effort to learn how to use a word-processor, *especially* if you are a graduate student. Most universities offer courses in which you can learn about computers, and how to use a word-processing program. You may choose from a large number of programs: WordPerfect, WordStar, MultiMate, PC-Write, Microsoft Word and many others work on any IBM-compatible computer; MacWrite and Microsoft Word both work on any Apple (Macintosh) computer. You will probably wish to use a program that is "supported" by your university—this means that you can get the software from them, and that they can help you learn how to use it and can answer any questions about it. You don't need to own a computer in order to use one; most universities have computer clusters in libraries and elsewhere on campus which students can use.

Some of the benefits of word-processing are:

- Your writing will improve. It is very easy to edit your writing if you are using a word-processing program. You can move paragraphs around, correct errors, and add or delete words. Once you have corrected all the errors and made final changes, you can print a perfect, error-free copy.
- The spelling in your papers may improve. Most word-processing programs have a spell-check that will search the document for spelling and typing errors, and will offer you an array of possible corrections.
- You can store data easily on diskettes, and can reprint a file (which is what you call each document) at any time.
- You can print multiple copies of a file (document).
- Computer literacy is becoming increasingly valued throughout the world and will certainly become even more important in the future.
- If you are a graduate student, you will have to hand in all your papers typed. Paying someone else to type your papers always poses problems; it's much safer to type your own. And if you want to learn how to type, you might as well learn on a computer keyboard, rather than on a typewriter.

Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Plagiarizing

1. How a paraphrase differs from a summary.

A paraphrase is a rewording of a sentence, paragraph, or other phrase. It is often used instead of using a direct quotation. A paraphrase is of approximately the same length as the original phrase; it just uses different words to express the same ideas. As with a direct quotation, you must acknowledge, or identify, the source of the information you paraphrased (see section on citations, p. 27).

A summary is a shortened version of a paragraph or phrase, written in one's own words. It contains only the main points of the original passage; the details are omitted. As with the paraphrase, the source must be acknowledged.

As an illustration, the following passage from the 1984/86 *Hoosier Guide* will be first paraphrased, then summarized.

Unspoken Language

A common cause of misunderstanding between persons of different cultures is the way in which we interpret gestures and other unspoken signals. These are seldom, if ever, taught in language classes and are so automatic that we forget that they may mean different things in different cultures. It would never occur to an American, for instance, that the right hand might be more acceptable than the left, yet in some cultures it is offensive to hand someone something with the left hand. Nor would it occur to the American woman that looking directly at a man could be interpreted as bold, flirtatious, or disrespectful. Here, it signals directness and honesty.¹

A paraphrase of this passage might be written as follows:

A Paraphrase of "Unspoken Language"

Different interpretations of body language can lead to misunderstandings among the cultures of the world. It is easy to forget that people of other cultures may interpret gestures and signals differently from the way we do, since we use them so automatically. Even in language classes, body language is rarely taught. Americans, for example, might use their left hand to give an item to another person, without realizing that in some cultures, the use of the left hand in this way would cause offense. Similarly, if an American woman looks a man in the eye, she is trying to show him that she is direct and honest. She would not realize that this action might be viewed as being impudent or immodest in other cultures.

Notice that the paraphrase includes the same information as the original, written in a different way. Although the main ideas are the same, the sentence structure and many of the words are completely different.

What follows is a summary of the original passage. Note that it is much shorter, addressing only the main points and leaving out the details.

A Summary of "Unspoken Language"

Different interpretations of body language can lead to misunderstandings among the cultures of the world, since a gesture can mean different things in different cultures. Most Americans don't realize that ordinary gestures, such as using the left hand when giving something to someone, could be viewed as offensive in other cultures.

2. Why you need to know how to paraphrase or summarize.

Knowing how to paraphrase and how to summarize is a very useful skill. You might be asked to read a book, a chapter of a book, or an article, and then summarize it. You would need to be able to identify the main points, and write them down in a logical and coherent manner. You might be asked to summarize the main points of an author's arguments as a test question. Or, you might have to write a research paper, in which you would have to paraphrase your sources. If you fail to paraphrase correctly, and use too many of another author's words without proper acknowledgment, you could be charged with plagiarism. In order to avoid committing plagiarism in any written work you do, you must learn to paraphrase and summarize.

3. How to write a paraphrase or a summary.

Writing good paraphrases and summaries is difficult even for native English speakers. There is no easy way to learn these skills, but with practice, your ability to paraphrase and summarize should improve.

Here are some strategies to follow to help you learn to paraphrase and summarize:

- **DO** know what paraphrases and summaries are, and what plagiarism is, so you can try to avoid committing plagiarism. Read the following section on plagiarism carefully.

¹ Ellie Macfarlane, ed. "Unspoken Language," *1984/86 Hoosier Guide* (Bloomington, IN: IU Publications/Printing, 7th ed.), p. 41.

- **DO** make sure you understand the passage you are planning to paraphrase. If you are unsure of the meaning of one of the main words, look it up in a dictionary.
- **DO** try to think of synonyms for some of the words, or try to think of simpler ways of saying the same thing. You may be able to restate one long word in two or three small words, e.g., replace "inconsequential" with "Isn't very important."
- **DO** rearrange the order in which items are presented in a sentence, and try to combine two short sentences or break one long sentence into two short ones, as long as what you write still makes sense. For example, if the original sentence read, "There were no casualties reported after troops entered the government building during a pre-dawn attack," you could paraphrase this as, "In the early hours of the morning, troops stormed the government building. No one was killed."
- **DO** paraphrase direct quotations, changing them into reported speech, unless the quotation is so perfectly-worded that you want to use it as a direct quotation (you probably wouldn't want to paraphrase "To be or not to be...", for example). In most cases, you should paraphrase direct quotations, e.g., "When asked about what effect the drought would have on his cattle, Bluffton farmer Len Howard replied, 'I'll probably have to sell them—there's just not enough grain to keep them alive.'" You could paraphrase this by writing, "One farmer reported that he would have to sell his cattle because of the recent drought, since he couldn't get enough grain to feed them."
- **DO** close the book or article after reading the section you wish to paraphrase or summarize, then try to write down the main ideas of the section in your own words. If you want to do a paraphrase, make a short outline of the passage, noting both the main points as well as secondary points, and then make up new sentences from the outline, without looking at the original. If you are trying to do a summary, write down only the main words or ideas, then write a few short sentences that explain these main ideas.
- **DON'T** include information that is not relevant to the topic in your summary. For example, if you are writing a paper on the reasons why Jim Greene decided to withdraw from the race for town mayor, and you read, "Citing health problems, James Madison Greene, whose classic good looks and boyish grin delighted ladies young and old, surprised nearly everyone when he announced his decision June 28 to withdraw from the mayoral race," you would use only the relevant information, e.g., "Greene withdrew from race June 28 for health reasons." You would not record the fact that Greene is good-looking since it is unrelated to the topic.
- **DO** footnote what you have just written, or write down the source using the author-date method (see pp. 27-28).

If you wish to try some paraphrasing exercises, refer to Oshima and Hogue, 1983, chapter 6 (the full citation is in the bibliography, p. 41).

4. What plagiarism is.

Plagiarism is unauthorized use of someone else's words. Almost everything in print in the United States is under copyright protection; therefore, if you use someone else's words in something that you are writing, without indicating that you are making a direct quotation or without identifying the source, you are plagiarizing those words. A person who plagiarizes is stealing someone else's words, and plagiarizing is considered a serious offense. Even if only five words in a sentence are the same as the original, this could be viewed as plagiarism.

As an example, the following passage would be considered to be a plagiarized version of the paragraph on "Unspoken Language" (from p. 19), reprinted here in part so you can make a better comparison. Words in italics are taken directly from the original passage.

A Plagiarized Version of "Unspoken Language"

Misunderstandings between persons of different cultures can often occur because of the way in which we interpret gestures and other unspoken signals. These signals are rarely taught in language classes and we forget that they have different meanings in different cultures because we do these gestures automatically. For instance, an American wouldn't realize that the right hand might be more acceptable than the left, or that it would be an offense to hand someone something with the left hand in some cultures.

The Original Version of "Unspoken Language"

A common cause of misunderstanding between persons of different cultures is the way in which we interpret gestures and other unspoken signals. These are seldom, if ever, taught in language classes and are so automatic that we forget that they may mean different things in different cultures. It would never occur to an American, for instance, that the right hand might be more acceptable than the left, yet in some cultures it is offensive to hand someone something with the left hand.

Although the sentence structure of the upper paragraph has been changed from the original version somewhat, it would still be viewed as being plagiarized because it contains too many phrases that are exactly the same. You may wish to refer back to the properly paraphrased version on p. 19 to see the extent to which you need to change words and phrases.

Most instances of plagiarism are unintentional. A person doing research for a term paper may write down a direct quotation from a book, and when writing his own paper, he may forget to use quotation marks or state where the quotation came from. Even more serious an offence is intentional plagiarism, in which entire sentences, paragraphs, or even articles have been copied word for word, with no attempt at acknowledgment. Nevertheless, both types of plagiarism can be easily recognized by a good instructor, and the student who is caught plagiarizing will almost certainly receive a failing mark (F) for that assignment, and perhaps for the course, even if the plagiarism was unintentional. In the most serious cases, the student may be expelled from the university.

The issue of plagiarism is extremely important, and you must take it very seriously. While "borrowing" someone else's words may be acceptable in some countries, it is against the law in the United States. The following section will provide some guidelines as to how you can avoid committing plagiarism.

5. How to avoid committing plagiarism.

There are various strategies you can use to avoid committing plagiarism. Some of these are listed below.

- Quote material directly, using quotation marks, (unless the quotation is indented, in which case quotation marks are not needed), followed by an acknowledgment of the source of the quotation or by a footnote. Direct quotations should be used sparingly, however, and are usually used only in lengthy research papers, or when quoting a person's actual remarks. It is usually better to paraphrase.
- Paraphrase or summarize the information, by restating what you want to use of the author's ideas in a different way, using your own words (see pp. 18-19). After you write your paraphrase, you can compare what you have written with the original paragraph. If too many words are the same (e.g., more than four or five words per sentence), you will have to rewrite the passage again. Once again, paraphrases and summaries must still acknowledge the original source (see citations, pp. 27-28).
- Write from your own experience. Form your own ideas and judgments. Even if you are writing a research paper, you can use your own ideas in it. Too many people fail to really *think* about what they are writing, and this may cause them to leave out an essential argument just because they didn't find it in a book.

Writing an Essay as a Homework Assignment

An essay is a relatively short (1 - 5 pages) composition in which you are asked to comment on a particular subject. It is often persuasive, involving the statement of your opinion, although it may be more descriptive depending on the assignment. An essay consists of three parts: a clearly-worded introduction, in which you make your thesis statement; a body, in which you list the arguments and evidence to support your thesis statement; and a conclusion, in which you summarize your main points and state their significance.

Here are some points to consider regarding essays:

- Although you may refer to outside sources when preparing to write an essay, you will not use as many sources as you would if you were writing a research paper (see the following section).
- Pay particular attention to the wording of the essay topic (which is usually assigned). If you are asked to "compare and contrast" two things, you must do just that—list the ways in which they are similar and ways in which they are different, then offer your opinion about which one seems to be "better" or "more successful" or whatever is the pertinent comparison.
- If you must choose your own topic, make sure that it is specific enough that you can cover it in the number of pages you are asked to do.
- Avoid generalizations, such as, "*Charlotte's Web* is a good book because it is enjoyable to read." You must use facts to support your opinions. Words like "enjoyable," "nice," "good," and "interesting" have very little true meaning and should be avoided.
- Write an outline before you begin to write, and follow the outline as you write (see pp. 24-26 regarding outlines). A good essay is one that is well-organized as well as persuasive, and having a good outline will help you move logically from one point to the next.

For a discussion about writing essays in essay tests, see pages 34-35.

Writing a Research Paper

1. Choosing a topic.

If you have to write a research paper for a course, the first step will be to choose a topic. Sometimes, your instructor will assign a topic for you to write on. Other times, however, you will be allowed to choose your own topic, either by selecting from a list of topics, or by deciding on a topic by yourself.

The choice of your topic is very important, since you will be spending numerous days or weeks considering it and researching it. There are several points you should consider when trying to choose a topic:

- **DON'T** choose a topic from a list just because you've heard about it before (but don't know what it is), or because you like the way it sounds. You must be sure that whatever topic you choose is one that really interests you.
- **DO** choose a topic from a list if you already know something about the topic, and if you are sure that this will be a topic that you will remain interested in.
- **DO** go to the library to find out preliminary information about possible topics. See if there is enough information available in the library for you to write a paper on the topic. Find out as much as you can about each topic, then make a decision based on your interests, and on the ease of getting information on that topic.

- **DON'T** choose a topic that is too large in scope, especially if you are trying to think of your own topic. Try to narrow the topic as much as possible, so that you can focus upon a very small aspect of the topic. For example, don't choose "World War II" as a topic—it is an enormous topic and it has no direction or focus. Instead, you should focus on one aspect of World War II, such as "The Significance of the Invasion of Normandy."

2. Where to find information for your research paper.

You should plan on spending a lot of time in the library in order to gather information for your topic, and you may have to go to more than one library, depending on how many libraries there are around the campus and its environs. There are a number of places where you may be able to find out information—some of these are listed below.

The card catalog. The card catalog of the campus' main library is a good place to start your search. You can look up your subject in the subject catalog, or an author if that is more appropriate. The card catalog will list books and journals, but it will not list individual articles published in these journals.

"Reader's Guide" and other periodicals indexes. *Reader's Guide* is a general index of periodical (journal) articles, organized by topic. There is a *Reader's Guide* for every year, and it is continually updated. You can use it to see if there are any articles published on a wide variety of general (non-scientific) topics. It will tell you the titles of any articles published that year on your topic, and will tell you the journal and page number where you can find that article. You then will have to find the journal yourself (they will be listed in the card catalog). In addition to *Reader's Guide*, there are more specialized indexes to periodicals, such as *Psychology Abstracts*. Some of these even contain summaries of the articles.

Infotrac and other computerized data bases. Infotrac is the name of a commonly-used computerized data base, which may or may not be available in your university library. It contains information similar to what you would find in *Reader's Guide*, except that this information is stored on a computer disk. Infotrac contains titles of articles from a wide variety of periodicals (including several major newspapers) from the past four or five years. It is easy to use and is attached to a printer so you can print any titles you wish to look up. Infotrac also contains a listing of certain U.S. government publications. As with *Reader's Guide*, Infotrac contains information on general topics only. Other computerized data bases can refer you to articles on more specialized subjects.

Other libraries in the area. In addition to the main library, there may be other libraries where you can get information. Many departments maintain their own subject libraries, so that there may be a math library, an art library, etc. There may also be a town or city library you can use.

Reference librarians. Reference librarians are among the best resources in any library. They may be stationed at a special desk or office, and they are trained in knowing how and where to obtain almost any type of information. They can tell you how to use the card catalog, encyclopedias, periodical indexes, photocopying machines, and computer data bases, and they can give you ideas about where else you should look. They can also help you find out other types of information, such as the address or phone number of a company or institution, or whether or not a particular book is in print.

Government Publications. Many universities have a government publications section, in which you can obtain government documents from the United States and perhaps from other countries as well. This section will probably have its own card catalog; you should ask at the government documents' reference desk for assistance.

Interlibrary loan. If you need a particular book and you can't get it locally, you may be able to get it through interlibrary loan (from another university), although this may take several weeks. Ask someone at the reference desk or circulation desk to help you.

Your instructor. Ask your instructor for names of books or articles that may be of use to you, or for general advice about researching your paper. You may be able to save yourself a lot of time and effort this way, since your instructor probably has some good ideas about sources you could use.

3. How to organize information for your research paper.

Each person will have a different strategy for collecting and organizing material to be used in a research paper, so this is just one way to do it.

Buy some 3-1/2" x 5" lined index cards. These will be useful both for note-taking and for keeping track of your references (sources). Write down the name of each source on an index card, just the way you would for a bibliographic entry (see pp. 30-31), with the author's last name first. Keep these cards separately from your notes.

As for note-taking, when you find a piece of information that you think will be useful for your paper, write it down on an index card. It is best to paraphrase the information onto the index card rather than quoting it directly—this way you won't get into trouble with plagiarizing later on (of course, if you find a passage which you intend to use as a direct quotation, you should quote it directly, and use quotation marks before and after it). On each index card, note down the author's name and the page number. If you have two sources by the same author, you should also include the year the article/book was published, so you don't confuse the two sources.

You may find it useful to photocopy articles that you think will be of use to you, since you will be able to refer to them at any time. If you do photocopy an article, make sure you write down all the information about the source of the article so that you can make a correct bibliographic entry. Make sure you know the author's name, the title of the journal, magazine, or newspaper, the volume number, the page numbers, and the year. Write this information on the first page of the article itself, and staple the pages together so you won't lose any of them.

The advantage of using index cards is that once you have collected the information you think you will want to use, you can begin to arrange the index cards in some kind of order. You can throw out any cards that you don't need, and you can move cards around easily. Some people, however, prefer to keep all their notes in a notebook, so that they can be sure they won't lose any notes. You should use whatever method seems most natural to you.

Regarding the nature of *what* you should take down as research notes, try to formulate questions that you intend to answer in your paper, and then look for information that helps to answer these questions. If you are doing a biography of a military general, for example, focus your paper on a particular aspect of his life, and try to answer specific questions about the general in your paper, such as, "Why did General X decide to attack the city on that day?" or "How was General X able to break the secret codes of the enemy?" If you have specific questions in mind when you start to do your research, your note taking will have a purpose. You will discover that there is so much material available about any given topic, that you must narrow your search (decide on a specific focus) right from the beginning. If you are having difficulty in narrowing your topic, see your instructor and ask him or her for advice.

4. Making an outline.

Some people prefer to make a detailed outline before beginning to write, and this is an excellent way of organizing your ideas. Having an outline will be most useful for papers that are more than five pages in length, but an outline is a good device to use to structure anything that you write. It may be possible to develop an outline before you collect your research notes, as long as you know enough about the subject. Otherwise, you will probably not be able to make an outline until you have collected some information about your topic.

An outline is a rough plan of what you will cover in your paper. An outline is divided into major categories and subcategories, and can be as general or as detailed as you wish. It uses both roman and arabic numbers, as well as capital and small letters, and has a general format like this:

I. First main heading, or topic

A. Subheading of first degree

B. Subheading of first degree

1. Subheading of second degree

2. Subheading of second degree

3. Subheading of second degree

a. Subheading of third degree

b. Subheading of third degree

C. Subheading of first degree

II. Second main heading

A.

B.

III. Third main heading

etc.

The number of subheadings will of course vary as needed—there could be three subheadings under letter B, or there could be none. You will probably have four or five main headings, rather than the three shown here. Note that letters (such as A, B, and a) alternate with numbers (such as I or 1). Note also that an outline can be used for other purposes too, such as when planning your answer to an essay question on a test.

For example, if you had to write a short research paper in an introductory anthropology course, you might choose to do a paper on the ritual of firewalking in the Fiji islands, perhaps because you'd spent some time in Fiji. In Fiji, both the major ethnic groups, the Fijians and the Indians, do firewalking—walking barefoot across hot stones or ashes. You wish to find out how the ritual differs between the two cultures.

An outline on the subject might look like this:

Sample Outline

- I. Introduction—a brief history of firewalking in Fiji, and of the two major races who live in Fiji
- II. Fijian firewalkers
 - A. How they prepare for the ceremony
 - B. Limitations on who can do firewalking
 - C. Reasons for firewalking
- III. Indian firewalkers
 - A. How they prepare for the ceremony
 - 1. Daily trips to the river to bathe
 - 2. Abstinence for a week
 - 3. All-night celebration before firewalking at dawn
 - a. Role playing, singing, and dancing
 - b. Trances
 - B. Reasons for firewalking
 - C. Animals and other people who have done firewalking
- IV. How Fijian firewalking differs from Indian firewalking
 - A. Time of day the ceremony is held
 - 1. Indians walk at dawn
 - 2. Fijians walk in afternoon
 - B. Indians walk on coals; Fijians walk on stones.
 - C. Reasons for ceremony are different
- V. Conclusion

Of course, you could put much more detail into the outline if you wanted to. For example, section II on Fijian firewalkers should be expanded so that it contains as much detail as does section III on Indian firewalkers.

The advantage of making a detailed outline before you start to write the paper is that you know exactly what you are going to write, and in what order you are going to write it.

5. Writing the paper.

Since entire books have been written on how to write a research paper, this section will be very brief. If you have great difficulty with your writing, you may want to look at one of these books, or get some outside help. You should also refer to the section entitled "General Advice for any Written Assignment," which is on pp. 15-18 of this handbook. Some additional points that you should consider are:

- **DO** write a rough draft, if time permits, and then rework it to make a final draft. It is very easy to make corrections if you use a computer word-processing package.
- **DO** write in paragraphs, following your outline, and make sure you use transition words so that the ideas flow smoothly from one paragraph to the next.
- **DO** set goals for yourself. Try to write a few pages each day.
- **DO** look at other papers or articles that have been written in the area you are writing about, or in a related area. Look at how they are organized, and how the paragraphs relate to one another. The idea is not that you should copy someone else's style, or organization, but that you should simply pay attention to conventions that are used in your subject area.
- **DON'T** forget to acknowledge all sources, whether they are paraphrased or quoted directly (see the following section on citations).

6. Citations.

There is no one best way to cite references, although the author-date method of citation is now commonly used in most journals. What is more important than the method you choose is that you be consistent, and that you use footnotes, or citations, whenever and wherever they are needed.

Your instructor may express a preference for a particular method, and if so, you should follow that method. You may be asked to **footnote** your citations, for example. This means that whenever you paraphrase someone else's ideas, or use a direct quote, you insert a raised footnote number directly following the information. Your first footnote will be number 1, the second will be 2, and so on. At the end of the paper you can have a separate "Endnotes" or "Notes" page in which you list the sources your footnotes came from. (Another option is to put the footnotes at the bottom of each page—as on p. 19 of this handbook—but that is a more complicated method.) Thus, if you use a direct quotation from *Newsweek* magazine, and if this is your sixth footnote, the footnote number would appear like this:

As Paul Bogart, a Greenpeace spokesman, said, "Mining has never been carried out in an environmentally safe manner anywhere on this planet."⁶

On the **endnotes** page, the citation would look like this:

6. Geoffrey Cowley and Joseph Contreras, "Exploiting the Last Frontier: Oil Wells in Antarctica?" *Newsweek*, June 20, 1988, p. 52.

A more common and easier way of citing references is to use the **author-date** method. In this method, you don't need to have an endnotes page. Instead of numbering footnotes, you insert the author's name, the year of publication, and the page number (if a specific page is mentioned) at the appropriate point in the text. The rest of the information—such as the title of the piece—is contained in the bibliography. Using the above example again, the author-date method would be used like this:

As Paul Bogart, a Greenpeace spokesman, said, "Mining has never been carried out in an environmentally safe manner anywhere on this planet" (Cowley and Contreras, 1988:52).

If you aren't using a direct quotation, you might use the author-date method as follows:

Kennedy (1987:538) refers to a "pentarchy" of the five leading powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Japan, and the European Community.

From the preceding example, we know that the author of the book is Kennedy, the year of the book is 1987, and that the page number of the reference is 538. The bibliography would then list the full reference, which in this case is:

Kennedy, Paul. 1987. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Random House.

If you are still uncertain about how to use the author-date system, refer to a style manual such as the *Chicago Manual of Style* (the citation for which is given in the bibliography, p. 41), or else look at recent articles from journals that follow this method so you can see exactly how it works.

7. Using direct quotations.

"Direct quotation" refers here to anything that you copy word for word, whether or not it is a passage from a textbook or a statement made by a public figure that was quoted in a newspaper or magazine. Generally, you should avoid using too many direct quotations, since you can almost always say the same thing in another way which is just as good, or even better. In some instances, however, you may want to quote something that an author or a public figure has said. If you do use a direct quotation, you should follow these guidelines:

- Make sure you copy the quotation correctly, word for word, without any spelling or other errors in it.
- Use quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quotation, as long as you are quoting 40 or fewer words. If you are quoting a longer passage, indent the passage five spaces from the left margin, leaving a blank line before and after the indentation. With an indented quotation, don't use quotation marks. (See the quoted paragraph entitled "Unspoken Language," p. 19, as an illustration.)
- If you don't want to use all of the words in the quotation, you must indicate the words you are leaving out by putting 3 dots in their place, e.g., "I strongly believe that drugs should not be legalized, . . . and that the military should be used in the war against drugs." These dots show that you have omitted one or more words from the quotation. In the above quotation, perhaps the omitted words were "although I realize there is pressure to do so." They were omitted because they did not contribute to the central meaning of the quotation. You should only omit words if they do not change the quotation's meaning.
- You should not add any words in a direct quotation, unless you need to add one or two words to clarify something. For example, if a paragraph was talking about a Mr. Brown, and it said "He was one of the major figures in the scandal," you could change the sentence to "[Mr. Brown] was one of the major figures in the scandal" so that it would be clear who the "He" of the original sentence referred to. Note the use of square brackets around the material that was inserted.
- In all other cases, if you are using a direct quotation, *never* change any of the words in the quotation. The quotation marks (or the indentation) tell the reader that the words you have used are exactly the same as those in the original quotation. If you want to change the quotation, don't quote it directly at all—paraphrase or summarize instead.

8. Deciding when to footnote.

You do not need to cite, footnote, or otherwise reference facts that are well-known, or easily obtainable, such as the population of a city or country, or of names and dates from history. You do, however, have to acknowledge other people's opinions, ideas, or comments about a given topic, by providing either a footnote or some other citation. You must also acknowledge the source of any graphs, statistical tables, maps, or other figures that you incorporate into a paper you have written.

9. Making a title page.

All research papers should have a title page as their first page. The title page identifies the paper by stating the title of the paper, the author's name, the course number or title, the name of the university or college, and the date. The title of the paper comes first. It is typed in capital letters but is not underlined. Several spaces below the title comes the name of the author of the paper. The rest of the information is typed near the bottom of the paper. Everything should be centered. Using the firewalking example (see the section on outlines, pp. 24-26), we can make a title page for the paper. Let's say that the paper has been written by Mahendra Prasad, and that the title is "The Firewalking Ritual in Fiji," written for Anthropology 101 at Garden State University. Here's what a title page might look like (without the page number at the bottom, of course).

THE FIREWALKING RITUAL IN FIJI

by Mahendra Prasad

**Anthropology 101
Garden State University
Garden, New Jersey
April 30, 1988**

10. Making a bibliography, or list of references.

A bibliography, or list of references, lists all the books, articles, and other sources that were used in your paper. The sources are arranged alphabetically according to the last name of the author. Your instructor may prefer for you to follow a particular format, so the punctuation and form may vary slightly from the format illustrated here. The important thing to remember is to be consistent in whatever form you use. If you put the year after the author's name in one entry, put it there in every entry, for example. And use consistent punctuation throughout.

If you use footnotes, and have an "Endnotes" page (see p. 27), the "Endnotes" page will be placed directly after the conclusion of the text of the paper. The "Bibliography" will then follow the "Endnotes" page, and will begin on a new page. If you use the author-date method, you will not need an "Endnotes" page at all. Instead, the conclusion of the text of the paper will be followed by a list of "References." A list of references differs from a bibliography in that the references contain only those sources which were actually mentioned in the text of the paper, while a bibliography may contain items that were not mentioned specifically in the paper but which were still used in the research process. Also, in a list of references, the year of the publication usually appears directly after the author's name, while in a bibliography, the year usually comes at the end of the entry.

Basic rules to follow when making bibliographic entries are:

- Authors' names are always written with the last name first. The format is to write the last name, followed by a comma and a space, then the first name or initial. For example:

Brown, Frank.

In some formats, when there is more than one author of a publication, only the first author listed will have his name listed last name first, e.g., Brown, F. and M. Baker.

- Alphabetize entries according to the authors' last names. If no author is listed, alphabetize that entry according to the first letter of the title of the book or article (ignoring words like "the" or "a"). In other words, if you wanted to list an article entitled "A Summer of Discontent?" from *Time* magazine, for which there is no author listed, it would be alphabetized with the S's because Summer is the first major word in the title. The entry would look like this:

"A Summer of Discontent?" Time, June 13, 1988, p. 51.

- The first line of each bibliographic entry should be justified at the left margin, while subsequent lines should be indented five spaces. This way, it is easier to identify the names of the authors.
- If there is more than one author but fewer than four, list all names. If there are four or more authors, list the first author's name, followed by "et al.", which means, "and others".
- Underline the title of the book, or of the journal or magazine (you will see, however, that italics usually replace underlines in published works).

What follows are simple sample formats for books and periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and journals). Note that the information that must be included differs between books and periodicals. For more complicated bibliographic entries, you can refer to almost any style manual or book about writing research papers.

Sample Bibliographic Entries for Books

Chatterjee, Kalvay K. English Education in India: Issues and Opinions. Delhi: The Macmillan Company of India. 1976.

Dulay, Heidi; Burt, Marina; and Krashen, Stephen. Language Two. New York: Oxford University Press. 1982.

Sample Bibliographic Entries for Periodicals

Borah, Woodrow. "Race and Class in Mexico." Pacific Historical Review, 23 (1954), pp. 331-342.

"North American Protestants and the Mexican Inquisition, 1765-1820." Journal of Church and State, 8 (Spring 1966), pp. 186-199.

You can look at the bibliography at the end of this handbook (p. 41) to see how a full bibliography looks.

TESTS

Types of Tests and Test Questions

There are two main types of tests: **objective** tests and **subjective** tests. Objective tests are tests in which you are asked to provide a specific answer that will be either right or wrong, such as a multiple choice test. Objective tests are easy to grade and as a result they are quite common, especially for testing large classes. A subjective test usually takes the form of an essay test. Essay tests are harder to mark since it is harder to determine if an answer is right or wrong. Essay tests are rarely given to large classes.

Math, computer science, and related subjects may have their own types of tests, which may include a variety of problem-solving activities. These types of tests are not discussed here.

Some instructors will use **take-home** tests instead of in-class tests as a method of evaluation. You may be given a set of problems to evaluate, questions to answer, or items to discuss, and you will be allowed to use your notes and other class materials, such as textbooks. You will be given a fixed number of days to complete the test, such as a week. When you are doing a take-home test, you are honor-bound to do the test work yourself, without help from anyone else.

Tests given to a class during the semester are usually given during class time, so they generally last from 40-75 minutes, depending on the length of the class period. The final exam for the course, if there is one, is usually longer—two or more hours in length—and may take place during a final exam week.

We will now look more at types of test questions used in objective and subjective tests. Although the type of test question used will vary from instructor to instructor, here are some common types of questions that you may see on a test.

Multiple choice. If you have taken the TOEFL, you are no doubt familiar with multiple choice questions. A multiple choice question consists of a stem (the question part) and four or five possible answers or choices, only one of which will be the correct answer. For example,

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| A week consists of | } stem |
| (a) 2 days. | } choices |
| (b) 7 days. | |
| (c) 31 days. | |
| (d) 365 days. | |

In the above example, (b) is the correct answer. The other choices—(a), (c), and (d)—are called **distractors** since they are there to distract you from choosing the correct answer.

True-false. In a true-false question, you must decide if a statement is true or false. For example, you would circle F for false in the following:

T F All cats have green eyes.

Short-answer or fill-in-the-blank questions. You may be asked to complete a definition, answer a question briefly, or fill in the most appropriate word or words. For example,

1. Identify the following in one or two sentences:

- (a) Ronald Reagan.
- (b) Indira Gandhi.

2. Define the following in one or two sentences:

- (a) Desertification.
- (b) The Green Revolution.

3. Fill in the blank with the most appropriate word(s).

- (a) In psychological terminology, a persistent fear of something or of some situation is known as a _____.
- (b) CO₂ is the chemical abbreviation for _____.

Matching. In matching questions, you are asked to match an item from one column with an item from another column. For example:

Write the letter of the correct definition next to the words at the left.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. _____ synonym | (a) A word that has the opposite meaning of another word. |
| 2. _____ homonym | (b) A word that has the same meaning as another word. |
| 3. _____ antonym | (c) A word that sounds the same as another word but has a different meaning. |

The correct answers for the above question would be 1. (b); 2. (c); 3. (a).

Essay question. Since essay questions take students a long time to write, there are not usually more than two or three of them on a test. You may be asked to spend from 15 to 30 minutes on just one question. A variety of words may be used to introduce an essay question—some of these are: describe, evaluate, compare and contrast, analyze, and summarize. An example of an essay question would be:

Discuss the symbolic value of the colors red and black in Stendahl's novel, *The Red and the Black*, giving specific examples to illustrate your analysis.

General Advice about Studying for a Test

Most of the points that follow are just good, common sense, but they are worth reviewing.

- **DO** begin to study for a test 5-7 days before the test date, whenever possible. It is much better to study for half an hour a day for six days than for three hours on the last day. If you wait until the night before the test to begin studying, you will have a very hard time absorbing all the material at once.
- **DON'T** skip your other classes in order to study for a test.
- **DO** ask your instructor about the types of questions that will be on the test. You could even ask your instructor to prepare a review sheet for the class—the worst that could happen is that the instructor will say no. The more you know about possible test questions, the easier it will be for you to prepare for the test.
- **DO** go to see your instructor, or the teaching assistant (if there is one for the course), several days or weeks *before* the test if you have problems with or questions about the course material. You can talk to instructors during their office hours. Don't be afraid to ask any questions you have—it will be too late to ask them after the test.
- **DO** make study notes, by writing down the most important points from the lectures and readings on separate pieces of paper, or on index cards. This way, you won't have to keep reading through all your notes; you can concentrate instead on learning just the most important concepts and ideas.

- **DO** save your study notes and all previous tests and quizzes and use them to review for subsequent tests.
- **DO** get a full night's sleep before a test. You can review your study notes one more time in the morning.
- **DO** try to answer any sample questions that may be listed at the ends of chapters in your textbook.
- **DO** see if there is a test file at the library which may contain tests from previous semesters for the course you are taking now. By looking at old tests, you may be able to get a better idea about the types of questions that will be asked.
- **DO** try to learn general principles and how to apply them. Think of examples to support claims. Be sure you *really* understand the concepts. Having a true understanding means that you can restate an idea or concept in your own words—in a different way. Memorization is not a substitute for comprehension, although it is appropriate in some situations, such as if you know that you will be asked to provide definitions for a list of words.
- **DO** try to anticipate (guess) what questions will be on the test. If you know you will be asked to provide definitions or short identifications for some items, think of all possible items that could be on the test and write out their definitions. For example, if you are studying anatomy, make sure you can identify important bones and muscles. If you know there will be an essay question on the test, try to think of three or four possible essay questions and prepare outlined answers to them.
- **DO** get involved with a study group, even if there are just two or three of you. Ask each other questions. Have each person make up ten questions that they think would be good test questions, and ask the others to answer them.

Managing Your Time When Taking a Test

Proper time management is essential when taking a test. Here are some points to remember:

- **DO** arrive at the test site at least five minutes early. Choose a quiet spot to sit, near the front of the room. Take out your pencils, pens, eraser, and anything else you need, (such as a calculator or a dictionary, as long as you are allowed to use it). Try to relax before the test begins.
- **DO** read through the entire test first before you write anything so you can gain a better idea of what is on the test. Many tests may contain both objective questions and subjective (essay) questions, so you should plan to spend more time answering questions that are worth more points, such as essay questions.
- **DO** wear or bring a watch to the test so you know how much time you have left.
- **DO** check over your test if you finish early. Make sure you have answered all the questions, and answered them according to the instructions. If you are sure that you initially put down an incorrect answer, change it; but if you are not absolutely sure, trust your first instinct and leave it as is. Check your spelling and grammar, and make sure your handwriting can be read clearly. Make sure your name is on the test.

Answering Essay Questions on Tests

Many students are reluctant to take classes in which they might have to take essay tests, since they are worried about their ability to write a well-organized and meaningful answer. Students whose second language is English may have additional doubts about the quality of their written English. Nevertheless, some undergraduates and most graduates will find an essay question on at least one test at some point in their university careers. Here are suggestions that may help you write a better answer.

- **DO** pay particular attention to the wording of the question. Make sure you understand the following verbs *before* you take the test, as they appear often on tests: analyze, compare, contrast, criticize, define, describe, discuss, evaluate, explain, identify, list, state, and summarize. If asked to compare two items or concepts, make sure you say what their similarities are, for example, rather than just listing the qualities of each one separately. If you are asked to give examples, make sure you provide examples. In general, you are expected to know the **relationships** between and among facts and ideas, not just what those facts and ideas are.
- **DO think** before you begin to write. Spend the first two or three minutes making a list of points you wish to mention in your essay, and then organize them into a rough outline. It is worth your time to prepare in this way since you will then have a better-organized essay.
- **DO** provide all relevant information, even if it is well-known information. Pretend you are writing the essay for someone who knows nothing about the subject. This way you will not leave out any important information.
- **DON'T** include any information that does not specifically address the question you were asked. Keep checking, as you write, to make sure that you are answering the question. A good answer does not have to be a long answer.
- **DO** answer the simplest question first, or the one you are most sure of, if there is more than one essay question on the test.
- **DO** write legibly, so your instructor can read what you write. If your instructor can't read what you have written, you will get a low grade no matter how good your response was.
- **DON'T** panic if you see a word or phrase in the question that you don't understand. Ask the proctor (the supervisor of the exam) what the word means—he or she should be able to tell you what it means as long as it is not a word that you are being tested on.
- **DON'T** ever leave an essay question completely unanswered, since you will then get zero points for that question. If you are running short of time, at least write down *something*. Your instructor will almost certainly give partial credit to anyone who even attempts to answer the question. So, write down either a few sentences, or an outline of what you would have said if you had had the time. If the problem is that you are unsure of what the answer is, take a guess. In this situation, write down whatever you know about the topic—perhaps you will get part of the answer correct.
- **DO** reread your answer before you hand in the test, if there is time. Correct any spelling and grammar mistakes that you find. If you wish to insert a sentence, you can make an asterisk (*) at the point where the sentence should go and write the sentence at the top or bottom of the page, preceded by another asterisk.

Answering Objective Questions on Tests

Objective tests, such as multiple choice, true-false, short answer, and matching, are much more common than essay tests, especially at the undergraduate level. Since the most common type of test question is probably the **multiple choice question**, the discussion that follows will be directed toward answering multiple choice questions. In many classes, especially in large lecture classes, students fill in the answers to test questions on a special answer form that can be read by a computer (such as the TOEFL answer form). It is therefore recommended that you bring one or two number 2 pencils and a good eraser to any test.

There are several strategies you can follow in order to do well on multiple choice questions:

- **DO** read the **instructions** slowly and carefully. Usually, you will be asked to circle the correct answer or fill in a circle, but you could also be asked to put an X through the correct answer, write down the letter of the correct answer, or put your answers on a separate piece of paper.

- **DO** read each **question** slowly and carefully, and read to the **end** of each question. Don't make assumptions about what the question is asking—make sure you know exactly what the question is asking.
- **DO** read each of the **choices** slowly and carefully. Read **all** of them before you make your choice—don't stop as soon as you see one that looks correct. Some questions could be of this form:

Which of the following is true regarding Leonardo da Vinci?

- (a) He worked for Cesare Borgia as a military engineer.*
- (b) He painted the "Mona Lisa" around 1502.*
- (c) One of his early teachers was Verrocchio.*
- (d) All of the above are true.*

in the above question, (d) is the correct answer, but a less-careful reader might have circled (a) or (b) or (c) without even reading (d). This type of question is tricky, since all the answers are in fact true; your task, however, is to identify the *best* answer.

- **DO** try to eliminate responses (choices) that you are sure are incorrect by crossing them out; this will make it easier to decide what the correct answer is. If you are still undecided, there are several ways in which you may be able to figure out what the correct answer is:
 - Use your common sense. Sometimes one of the choices will just sound strange, or unlikely, and you can eliminate it.
 - You can probably eliminate choices that use such absolute words as "always" or "never," since exceptions will almost always exist.
 - If one of the choices is much longer than the others, it may be the correct answer.
 - If two choices seem to be opposite in meaning, one of them is probably the answer.

If you are *still* unsure of what to answer, make a guess from the choices that you have not eliminated. In most tests, marks will not be deducted for an incorrect answer, and you may get lucky and guess the correct answer. Don't leave a question unanswered unless there is a penalty for incorrect answers.

- **DO** answer each question as you come to it, rather than answering only those questions you are absolutely sure of. This way, if you run out of time, you won't have left any questions unanswered. You can mark difficult questions with a check (✓) or asterisk (*) in the margin next to them. Then, if you have time later on, you can come back to these questions and think about them some more.
- **DON'T** be afraid to ask the proctor (the supervisor of the test, who may or may not be your instructor) if you have a question about one of the test items. Sometimes the wording of a question is unclear, or a word may be used that you don't know, so see if the proctor can help you.
- **DON'T** ever look at anyone else's test paper, use unauthorized notes, or talk to a classmate during the exam. If you need to borrow a pencil or an eraser, put up your hand and ask the proctor—don't ask a classmate or else the proctor may think you are trying to cheat. Students are supposed to report instances of suspected cheating to the instructor. If you are suspected of cheating, you may receive an F for the test, and maybe for the course.

Quizzes

A quiz is a short test. Some instructors will give their students weekly quizzes; an instructor may even give the class a pop quiz (a surprise quiz that is not announced in advance). Quizzes are not worth a lot of points; their purpose is to ensure that the students are keeping up with the work, and to let the instructor know if concepts are being learned. A quiz usually takes about 10-15 minutes to answer, and may consist of anywhere from one to ten questions or problems. Studying for quizzes is good preparation for tests, and quizzes let you see the types of questions your instructor likes to ask. You should answer and prepare for scheduled quizzes in the same way you study for tests.

PLACES YOU CAN GO TO GET HELP IF YOU NEED IT

American universities can be confusing at first, especially if you come from another country. You should therefore be aware of places on campus where you can go to get help, for whatever purpose. Of course you may not need to go in person; you may also be able to get the help you need—such as finding out if a particular book you want is carried by the university library—over the telephone.

You may need help in a variety of ways, and not just in emergency situations. You may need a question answered about one of your subjects, you may be feeling sick and need to see a doctor, or you may wish to know where you can buy a particular spice or other ingredient that is needed to make a food dish from your country. Learning how and where to seek help will mean that you will have to ask a lot of questions. You should find, however, that people you talk to will be very happy to help you, as long as you make your needs known to them.

What follows is a list of places you can turn to if you need to get questions answered, or need help of some kind. The list is divided into two sections—academic-related and other types.

Where to Seek Academic-Related Help

1. *Your instructors.* If you are having trouble in any of your courses, you may wish to talk with the instructor of that course. This may be more difficult to do if the class is a large one, but you may still be able to make an appointment with the instructor, or visit during office hours. Don't ever call (telephone) instructors at their homes, however, unless they have given you permission to do so, or unless it is an emergency.
2. *Teaching assistants (TAs) or associate instructors (AIs).* If you are taking an undergraduate course, especially one in which there are a lot of students, there may be an AI or a TA assigned to the course to assist the regular instructor, and to help the students in the class. AIs or TAs may hold special sessions in the afternoons or evenings, and are usually available one or two days a week to answer students' questions.
3. *Other private or subject tutors.* If you are having particular difficulty with a course, and you are unable to get as much help as you need from your instructor, from a TA, or from an AI, you may wish to ask a secretary from that department how you could get a private tutor, or if there are special subject tutors. A private tutor would probably be a graduate student from that department, and you would have to pay by the hour. Because of the expense, a private tutor would be recommended only if the course in question were a required course that was of some importance to you. You may be able to get a subject tutor instead, who tutors students for free. The only way to find out if there is a subject tutor is if you ask someone in the department.
4. *Classmates.* You may be able to get help from one or more of your classmates. You could try to get involved with a study group that meets each week, or meets before tests; or you could try to meet with a fellow classmate after each class to discuss what went on in the class, so you could answer each other's questions. One important point to remember, however: Do all homework assignments by yourself unless the instructor specifically tells you that you can work in pairs or small groups. This also means that you should not do homework or assignments for someone else.
5. *Your academic advisor.* Although your academic advisor may not be able to help you with academic questions about a particular course, advisors can help you choose courses, help you try to get credit for a post-secondary course you took in another country, give you information about required courses, or tell you what to do if you need to change one of your courses. Make sure you make an appointment if you need to see an academic advisor.

6. *Libraries.* Libraries are a wonderful source of information. You can get general information about how the library operates at the information or circulation desk. You can ask the reference librarians how to find out almost any type of information. You can read most major daily newspapers there, and you may even be able to get magazines and newspapers from your country. Don't forget to **ask** if you just need to know how to use the photocopying machine.
7. *Study skills books.* Study skills books will help you if you are having trouble developing good study habits, taking notes, writing papers, coping with tests, etc. Many go into much more detail than has been presented in this handbook. You can look under "study skills" in the card catalog of the library, or you can look for a "study" section in any bookstore. See the bibliography at the end of this handbook (p. 41) for some suggested texts.
8. *Books written for students of English as a Second Language.* In the library, you may be able to get study skills-type books that have been written especially for non-native English speakers. If your university has an intensive English program, you may be able to get these books from them. They may provide helpful information not just about academic questions, but also about coping with life in the United States. A number of these have been listed in the bibliography at the end of this handbook (p. 41).
9. *Style manuals, or books on writing.* If you are doing graduate work and plan to write a dissertation, you may find it useful to buy or borrow from the library a copy of a style manual, such as the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Style manuals tell you everything you would ever need to know about the proper format of anything that is written, such as how to list unusual sources in a bibliography. Books on writing, such as Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, will help you improve the quality of your writing in English, if you are seriously interested in doing so.
10. *Learning skills centers/Campus writing centers.* If you are at a large university, check the campus telephone book to see if there is some kind of learning skills or study skills center, or a writing center. These centers may offer special classes or free evening sessions in which you may be able to get advice about good study strategies. Writing centers, if available, can help you with your writing, usually without charge.
11. *The English department.* Most of you will have to take courses in the English department, and courses that focus on writing can be very useful if you want to improve your ability to write well in English. The more practice you get at writing in English, the better your writing will be.

Where to Seek Other Types of Help

1. *The administrative office that deals with foreign students.* In bigger universities with sizable foreign student populations, there may be an "Office for International Students" (or an office with a similar name) where you can go for help or advice. Otherwise, you could try going to the office of the Dean of Students. These administrative offices will be able to help you if you have questions about visas, work permits, general finances, etc. If they can not help you directly, they should be able to tell you where you can go to get help.
2. *The student health center.* Most of you will be able to subscribe to a student group health insurance plan, which means you can get good service for a relatively low price. You should therefore not hesitate to go to the health center if you have any health-related problems, or if you simply want to have a physical check-up. The health center will also be able to give you sensible information about AIDS, in case you are worried about the chances of your getting AIDS while you are away from your home country. In addition to helping you with your physical health, the health center should be able to help you if you need any type of psychological counseling, and often, you get several free visits a year. You should not be embarrassed about seeing a counselor—many people go to see counselors or psychologists just to talk over difficulties they have been having, such as family problems.

3. *Your dormitory advisor.* If you live in a dormitory or campus residence, there will probably be an upperclassman (upper-level student) or a faculty member who lives in the dorm. They may be called "Junior Advisors" or "Resident Advisors," or have a similar title, and their purpose is to help you in any way they can, either regarding academics or anything else.
4. *The police, the hospital, or the local fire department.* If there is an emergency, such as a fire, or a robbery, or a serious injury that cannot be handled by the health center, do not hesitate to contact the appropriate agency. If you live on campus, you can call the campus police; if you are off-campus, call the local police. They should arrive within 5-10 minutes. In some cases, the police or the fire department could even take you to the hospital for free if you can't afford an ambulance.
5. *The campus financial aid office.* If you are having money problems, and need to get a student loan, or want to get a campus job, you should go to the campus financial aid office and talk with financial aid personnel. Whether or not you are eligible for financial aid or eligible to get a job may depend on your visa and status, so check with them first.
6. *The campus phonebook.* You may be surprised at how much you can accomplish over the phone. You can save a lot of time by phoning rather than walking from office to office.
7. *Campus organizations.* When you arrive on campus, you will probably receive a list of campus clubs and organizations. If your university has a relatively large foreign student population, there may well be some sort of organization for foreign students, or even an international center which organizes activities, such as coffee hours or films. Depending on the country you come from, there may even be a students' association representing your country or your geographical area. These groups may help you adjust better to life in the United States, and can provide you with a support group of friends with whom you can talk.

In addition to internationally-oriented organizations, you may be able to benefit from involvement with other campus or student organizations. You may wish to join the math or science club, or get involved with the student newspaper. The more you talk with people, be they American or from another country, the more you will learn about how you can make the most out of your time in the United States.

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Susan Hobbs was born in Boston, Massachusetts, grew up in Ontario, and attended two years of high school in Korea. Following her graduation from Williams College in 1981, she joined the Peace Corps, where she was assigned to the Fiji Islands from late-1981 until mid-1985. While in Fiji, she taught high school math, and also compiled the first dictionary of Fiji Hindi—a language that is spoken by over half the population of Fiji—entitled *A Fiji Hindi English, English-Fiji Hindi Dictionary*, published in 1985.

Hobbs gained her Master's degree in Applied Linguistics in 1988 from Indiana University, and has taught in Indiana University's Intensive English Program. She now works as a writer and editor for Indiana University's Office of Publications. Her travels to over twenty countries, and her extensive contact with foreign students, both from the perspective of teacher and classmate, has given her considerable insight into the needs of the incoming foreign student. It is hoped that this handbook in some way fulfills these needs.

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